



SJSU Annual Commencement Ceremony 2008
San José Mayor Chuck Reed
Spartan Stadium
Saturday May 24, 2008

Wow. This is exciting. What a crowd. There are more people in this stadium than lived in the small farming town of Garden City, Kansas, where I grew up.

My first home in Garden City was in a public housing project. One of those ugly cinder block barracks left over from WWII. It was not a pleasant place to live but my parents had moved north to escape the crushing poverty of rural Mississippi, and they were happy to have a place to live.

When my parents got married, they had no money and their families had no money but they got one nice wedding present. My grandfather gave them a pig. They kept the pig and fattened him up. A year later when I was born they still had no money and they had no health insurance so they sold the pig to pay for me.

They named me Charles Rufus Reed after my grandfather, Charlie Rufus Robinson. Now Rufus is kind of a funny name but I'm grateful I wasn't named after the pig. If I had been, I guess I would be called Mayor Porky.

We were always a working class family and I worked. I starting working in elementary school – sweeping floors. When I was in middle school I was digging ditches and shoveling gravel. I worked in the fields. I was operating a bull dozer at age 15. By age 16, I was driving an 18 wheeler semi truck hauling sand and dirt.

My Dad had only an 8th grade education and he believed in learning by doing. One of the things I learned by doing dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs was that I wanted to get an inside job with no heavy lifting.

I competed for and won a scholarship to the Air Force Academy, where we lived by an Honor Code of No Lying, No Cheating, No Stealing and No Toleration of those who do. I learned a lot of things at the Academy, but the most important things were Core Values:

Integrity First – Service Before Self – Excellence.

I graduated from the Air Force Academy nearly 38 years ago with a B.S. degree and was commissioned into the US Air Force as a brand new 2nd Lt.

The Air Force Academy is a great school, but no school can teach you everything. Not even SJSU can teach you everything. Some things have to be learned on the job.

So when I was a new Lieutenant I had a few things to learn about dealing with enlisted troops. I thought I had to impress them with my importance so they would accept my authority. One day I had just arrived at McCoy AFB in Florida. I was sitting in my first office, on the first day in my first job when a young airman knocked on the door. Being self conscious of my new position and wanting to impress the airman with my importance, I picked up the phone and waved the airman to enter. I said into the phone:

“Yes, General, I’ll see him this afternoon and I will pass on your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, Sir.”

Feeling as though I had sufficiently impressed the airman, I asked.

“What do you want?”

He said: “Nothing important, sir. I’m just here to hook up your phone.”

Eventually, I learned that leadership by example was a better way to impress the troops and that leading from the front was the most effective way to motivate them to do their best.

Today you are receiving a degree from another great university in a land of freedom and opportunity and you now have a leadership obligation to step up to. In the 30 minutes I have left . . . Did I say 30? I meant in the few minutes I have left, I want to talk about leadership.

This is the part of the speech for which there will be a test. In fact, you will be tested on your leadership ability over and over again.

I began to learn about leadership at the Air Force Academy, which is far more than a college. It is a four year living laboratory in which young men and women are shaped to prepare them to be able to lead others in war, to be able to make life and death decisions, if necessary.

After graduation, I got to work with and learn from some great leaders, most of whose names begin with General and end with Sir, as in “Yes. General Smith, Sir.”

In my private law career, I was a law firm CEO and Managing Partner I served as president or chair of many boards, commissions and other organizations.

Based on my personal experience and observation, I think there are three essential elements to being a great leader. I am not going academic on you. I will leave that to your professors. It's just my observation of the great leaders I have known. Of course, there are many bad leaders and you will learn a lot of hard lessons from bad leaders. And there are many good leaders with lots of other characteristics. But I think all great leaders share some common traits:

INTEGRITY.

COMPETENCE.

VISION.

Integrity – honesty and consistency over time.

If you don't have integrity, you will never get the best from your people. If they don't trust you, they will always be hedging their bets. They won't take risks if they think you might hang them out to dry. Instead of looking ahead they will be looking over their shoulder.

Competence – skills and knowledge.

You have already knowledge from your education here that will serve you well, but it is only the starter kit. You will never stop learning and all great leaders want to get better at whatever it is they do, every time they do it.

Vision – knowing where you are going.

What is your mission, your goal, your objective? If you don't know where you are headed and how you plan to get there, not one wants to follow. No one wants to wander in the woods without a compass. You have to be the compass, or at least carry a GPS receiver.

These three characteristics will be important to you whether you are leading 3 people or 3000 people. Each of these characteristics is within your reach. You can be a leader if you want to.

Some of you will be placed into leadership positions the day you are hired. Some of you will have to wait a while longer. But all of you will be tested on your leadership ability throughout your career. We are counting on you to pass those tests and take our community to new heights of accomplishments.

Since I became Mayor I have met with more than 80 Silicon Valley CEOs of driving industry companies to encourage them to stay here and grow here. I want to say the same to you as future leaders. We want you to stay here and grow here so that San Jose will remain the Capital of Silicon Valley and Silicon Valley will remain the innovation center of the world.

Over the past 5 decades, the people of San Jose and Silicon Valley have changed the world. We are at the epicenter of the transformation of society from the industrial age to the information age and into the knowledge age. The innovations that have come out of our collective efforts have helped raise the living standards for hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Transistors, Integrated Circuits, Disk Drives, Microprocessors, Personal computers, desktop publishing, Networking, Internet, PDA's, BioTechnology, and NanoTechnology

Hearing that list, you might think that you are too late, that everything important has already

happened. Not so. The best days of Silicon Valley are ahead of us.

For example: . . . Clean Tech has started. Clean Tech companies have sprouted here. We just need to make sure they stay here and grow here.

San Jose's Green Vision is a roadmap for San Jose, the Capital of Silicon Valley, to become **THE WORLD'S CENTER OF CLEANTECH INNOVATION.**

Once again, our collective efforts are going to change the world. We will help solve the climate and energy crises by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil. We will do the R&D necessary to show the cities of the world how to become clean and green.

We have to figure out how to reduce our electricity consumption by 50% per person and get all of our electricity from renewable energy sources. We have to figure out how to recycle or reuse all of our water, and all of our garbage. We need to build or retrofit 50 million square feet of green buildings, and we need to power all of our city vehicles with alternative fuels.

We need your help to do all these things and more.

We will create 25,000 clean tech jobs over the next 15 years and we are counting on you to fill those jobs. In many of the Silicon Valley companies I visited, there are more SJSU grads than from any other university. And in many of those companies there are more SJSU grads than all other universities combined.

San José State is the number one supplier of education, engineering, computer science and business graduates to Silicon Valley. But that is not enough; we need the nurses, the artists and all the other SJSU grads in all the other disciplines to make our community better, to meet the needs of all our people.

We need your leadership in this valley as SJSU grads have done for the last 150 years. You are following a long line of great people with tremendous accomplishments. You have opportunities open to you that few people in the world can even dream of. It's now up to you. Your future is in your hands.

In closing, (my favorite words) I want to thank and congratulate President Don Kassing for his leadership and accomplishments. He has done a great job and we will miss him. I have enjoyed working with him for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is we agree that what is good for San Jose State University is good for the City of San Jose, because every great city must have a great university. Don, thanks.

I also want to thank your families for supporting you. I know this day does not come without sacrifice and support of families. Thank you for helping these students. Thank you for your contribution to our university and our city.